

COMMENTARY

THE RETURN TO WISHFUL THINKING

Has International Communism Really Changed?

G. F. HUDSON

IN JANUARY 1946, just over twenty-eight years after the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd, James Forrestal sent to Walter Lippman some notes he had made on relations between the United States and the Soviet Union with a covering letter in which he wrote:

They [the notes] are preliminary to a study on (1) the nature of the Russian state philosophy, both in terms of historical and dialectical materialism; (2) whether the long-term Lenin-Marxian objectives still hold; and (3)

the possibility of accommodation between the democratic and communistic systems.

There is no place in government where such a study has been made—at least I have been unable to find one—and it seemed to me important that it should be made as objectively and coldly as possible, because to me the fundamental question in respect to our relations with Russia is whether we are dealing with a nation or a religion—religion after all being merely the practical extension of philosophy. (*The Forrestal Diaries*, p. 134.)

The Secretary of the Navy evidently felt, however, that he must apologize for his suggestion that official time should be wasted in any enterprise so remote from practical affairs as an inquiry into the nature of the Soviet regime, for in sending a copy of the same notes to Henry Luce, he remarked, "I realize it is easy to ridicule the need for such a study as I have asked Willett to make, but I think in the middle of that laughter we always should remember that we also laughed at Hitler."

THE source of many errors in policy in dealing with the Soviet Union, G. F. HUDSON suggests, has been the desire of diplomats and statesmen to see that country as simply one more among the nation-states of the modern world. Instead of trying to understand that the Soviet regime is a new phenomenon in modern history, remaining the same in basic character through all its surface changes, we have been too inclined simply to wait for Russia to return to "normal," a thing that never happens. With the death of Stalin, Mr. Hudson believes, we are in danger—on the basis of "evidence" that is either trivial or non-existent—of relapsing once more into this kind of wishful thinking. A Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, Mr. Hudson has contributed to COMMENTARY during recent years some of the most searching analyses of present-day international politics. Mr. Hudson was born in Cheshire in 1903 and is the author of a number of books in the field of history.

THE historian of a future age, if indeed he finds any cause for amusement in the events of our time, is less likely to discover it in Forrestal's modest proposal of 1946 than in the fact that he could not trace any previous study of these topics in official Washington at that date—and he might have added London, which had been almost equally

infertile in research of this kind. The two great Western democracies had been astonishingly incurious, as far as official quarters were concerned, about the modes of thought inspiring a political system which had inherited the territories of the Russian Czar-dom and extended its influence through Communist parties in every country of the world.

It might have been expected that the study of this new reality in international affairs would be of major interest for those who were professionally concerned with the making of foreign policy. But it was not so, and the reasons are not far to seek. The senior diplomats of the 1930's were men who had learned their trade before 1917; their tradition and experience were those of a world in which relations between sovereign states were conducted according to certain rules and within limits set by certain basic assumptions. In that world religious and "ideological" predilections had been banished from diplomacy and a clear line drawn between the domestic and foreign affairs of states; governments had economic and strategic interests which brought them into conflict or alliance with one another, and the business of diplomacy was to adjust these relations in a practical, businesslike manner somewhat analogous to a lawyer's practice in the courts.

The advent of Soviet Communism confronted Western diplomats with ideas and behavior entirely alien to their experience. They intensely disliked the intrusion of this new factor, not so much because of its revolutionary social order—they prided themselves on their lack of prejudice about the internal regimes of other countries—as because of its refusal to accept the established principles and conventions of intercourse between nations. But they consoled themselves with the thought that this disagreeable phenomenon could not last. Either the new revolutionary power would be overthrown, or it would settle down and revert to the ways of normal, respectable states in its international relations.

As time passed, events seemed to confirm

this expectation. The Soviet regime did not, indeed, return to capitalism, as the prophets had anticipated on the adoption of the "new economic policy" in 1921; on the contrary, after a period of retreat it plunged deeper than ever into economic collectivism, wiping out the remnants of private trade and forcing the peasants into collective farms. But that did not greatly worry the diplomats; what interested them was a very desirable tendency which they thought they saw working itself out—the return from revolutionary internationalism to the attitudes and habits of a nation-state.

First Stalin preached "socialism in one country" and drove out Trotsky, the apostle of world revolution; then, after Hitler had come to power in Germany, Russian patriotism began to creep back into public speeches and history textbooks; then, when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, nationalist fervor was raised to fever pitch by official propaganda; finally, Stalin dissolved the Comintern and came to meet the statesmen of Britain and America clad no longer in a Russian worker's jacket, but in the resplendent uniform of a Soviet marshal.

The Western diplomats were satisfied; the international revolutionary interlude was over, and it was again the Russian nation-state with which the world had to deal. It was true that the Russia of the Czars had often been a difficult and troublesome factor in international politics, and the new Russian empire showed signs too of having a large, bearish appetite, but as a nation-state it belonged to the traditional, normal world and could be handled by the ordinary techniques of diplomacy. It was clearly no longer worthwhile—if it ever had been—to study this strange Marxist-Leninist doctrine, which had ceased to be relevant to practical affairs.

IN THEIR own eyes, the diplomats' attitude towards the development of the Soviet Union was a strictly realistic one, uninfluenced by any ideological sympathy for Communism—which was indeed rare enough among professional civil servants in London and Washington. They would resentfully

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have repudiated the suggestion that wishful thinking had played any part in their acceptance of the view that the Soviet Union had been re-transformed into the Russian nation-state.

Yet there *was* wishful thinking in this estimate, for it was what they wanted to happen, and as they had not taken the trouble to acquire a genuine understanding of Marxist-Leninist ideology, they interpreted events in accordance with their own wishes. This kind of "realistic" wishful thinking, excluding questions of ideology from the field of international relations, and quite compatible with extreme conservatism in domestic politics, was, of course, something different from the progressive-romantic outlook which projected its own aspirations and ideals on to the Soviet scene and discovered, even though with varying degrees of mental reservation, a profound affinity of purpose with the men of the Kremlin. But positive ideological sympathies arising from left-wing political principles could very easily be combined with the non-ideological official belief in the Soviet regime's return to traditional normality as a nation-state, as they were combined in what may be regarded as the classic statement of American illusions about Russia during the Second World War—ex-Ambassador Joseph Davies' conclusion to his book *Mission to Moscow*:

The Russia of Lenin and Trotsky—the Russia of the Bolshevik Revolution—no longer exists. Through gradual, stern and often cruel evolution that government has developed into what is now a system of state socialism operating on capitalistic principles and steadily and irresistibly swinging to the right. . . . The present government professes to be a democracy. It is, I believe, sincerely devoted to peace both for practical and ideological reasons. The present government further proclaims and asserts constitutional protection for civil and religious liberty. Constitutional protections do not always work perfectly in certain regions because of political and personal purposes, as we know from our own experience here. In my opinion the Russian people, the Soviet government and the Soviet leaders are moved basically by altruistic concepts. It is their purpose to promote the brotherhood of man and to improve the lot of the common people. They wish to create a

society in which men may live as equals, governed by ethical ideals. The British Empire, the Americas and Russia, along with China, are the great complementary powers of the earth. Their interests, their governmental ideas and purposes do not conflict.

THE events of the next few years brought bitter disillusionment to those who indulged in such expectations. The acts of Soviet policy provided evidence which could not be entirely ignored by even the most fervent believers in Stalinist altruism. Far from behaving like a nation-state in a firm coalition of allies, the Soviet Union used its military power after the collapse of the Nazi empire to put Communist parties in power wherever it was able to do so. Elsewhere the Communist parties, far from having become detached from the Soviet Union by the dissolution of the Comintern, became more than ever the faithful instruments of Soviet policy, and the Comintern itself returned to life in the new guise of the World Federation of Trade Unions. Instead of seeking peace, the Soviet government produced tensions near to war by a series of threatening or aggressive acts; instead of striving to improve the lot of the common man, it ruthlessly exploited the occupied and satellite countries of Eastern Europe and tried to prevent the American-aided economic recovery of Western Europe by every means in its power.

The result of this unforeseen experience, however, was within a very short time a new rally of the Western democracies and a new affirmation of their fundamental political principles in the face of the common danger which threatened them. They drew closer together for mutual defense, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization came into being; with its machinery for permanent economic, as well as strategic coordination, it went far beyond the type of old-fashioned military alliance and embodied a real community of purposes and ideals, being confined as it was to nations adhering to a democratic way of life. At the same time officialdom in London and Washington at last recognized the need for some serious study of Communism, and there was a consider-

able increase of understanding of the forces against which defense was now to be organized.

THE postwar solidarity and cooperation of the Western democracies reached its climax with their collective action in Korea in 1950—an action which, although authorized and initiated by the United Nations, was led by the states already linked together in the NATO alliance, and which confronted on battlefields by the shores of the Pacific basically the same enemy as had previously been thwarted without bloodshed in the blockade of Berlin.

But since the end of 1950, although great progress has been made with the jointly planned program of rearmament, the political situation has deteriorated. In the first place, the shift of the international storm-center from Europe to the Far East has loosened Anglo-American cooperation because of the differences between British and American policies towards China. Further, the prospect of German rearmament has produced a growing alarm and apprehension in France, and has led to a nostalgic craving for a return to the old Franco-Russian partnership for checking Germany—a tendency necessarily disruptive of NATO. Then in the latter part of 1952 the talk in the American Presidential election campaign of substituting “liberation” for “containment” in the conflict with Communism raised widespread fears in Europe of being dragged into an aggressive anti-Communist crusade leading to a war of which the brunt would be borne by Europeans, while at the same time the excesses of “McCarthyism” seemed to be undermining those democratic principles which were the essential political basis of the unity of the free world. Finally, with these factors of disruption already operative, came the news of the death of Stalin which immediately raised hopes of radical changes for the better in Soviet policy.

These hopes have been largely disappointed, but there has been just enough in the way of gestures from the Soviet side to keep alive the sense of new promise in the Malen-

kov era, and there are today definite signs of a partial return to the wishful thinking of 1941-45. The return is indeed only partial, because events since 1945 cannot be forgotten overnight, and outside the ranks of near-Communist fellow-travelers probably nobody would now write the kind of sentimental eulogy of the Soviet regime which Joseph Davies penned twelve years ago in the passage quoted above. But there is a marked revival of the idea that the Soviet Union, however tough and truculent, is, after all, just another nation-state, and that the important thing is to get away from ideology in international relations.

This outlook is widespread in Western Europe, where there is a natural tendency to turn back with yearning regret to the ways of the 19th century—the golden age when Europe was manifestly the center of the world and had not yet been wrecked and ruined by two gigantic wars. We got on very well, so runs the argument, when the game of sovereign power politics was played according to the rules and there was no nonsense about world-saving ideals; there were still wars when other means failed, but they did not break up the foundations of European life and the diplomats soon tidied up the mess they left behind them; things only really began to go wrong when we began to have wars to make the world safe for democracy, organizations to establish perpetual peace, and attempts to banish aggression forever by demands for unconditional surrender, war crimes trials, and total disarmament of defeated nations.

If the sequels to the two world wars are compared with the hopes cherished with official encouragement by the peoples of the victorious states in their belligerent struggles, it is clear that there is plenty of ground for an attitude of cynical debunking towards the democratic idealism of the 20th century. It can convincingly be argued that the Europe of 1850, or even of 1750, was more civilized in its modes of international intercourse and less rancorously divided than the Europe of 1950. But the old Europe was based on the principle of state sovereignty

and (except during the Wars of Religion and the French Revolution) on indifference to ideological classifications; from which it is inferred that the best way out of our current misfortunes would be to get back to that relatively happy state of affairs.

UNFORTUNATELY we cannot return to the practice of a bygone age merely because we would like to do so. Statesmanship in each epoch has to solve the problems which are set by contemporary conditions, and in a time when militant ideologies are on the march, account must be taken of that fact, even by those who deplore it.

It is vain to start from the assumption that ideology can be ignored in formulating foreign policy. *Whether* it can be ignored is just the question on which all else depends. Or, to put the matter in concrete terms, is Communism just a political creed which decides the domestic policies of Communist governments without affecting their foreign policies, or is it a *Weltanschauung* which conditions the whole outlook of those who are educated in it and determines their entire approach to international relations?

It is quite true that under Stalin there has taken place in Russia not only a revival of ordinary patriotic feeling after the anti-nationalist universalism of the Lenin era, but also a cultivation of rabid chauvinism which brings shame and confusion to those who try to combine admiration for the Soviet regime with an honest devotion to Marxist principles. For this reason, if for no other, emphasis on the regression of the Bolshevik Revolution to Russian nationalism has long been part of the stock-in-trade of anti-Communists in polemics with left-wing fellow-travelers who believe that an internationalism divorced from all patriotic prejudices is the first duty of a truly progressive mind.

But in relation to the pseudo-realists of the right it is just those features of the Soviet regime which cannot be explained in terms of Russian nationalism that require to be stressed. To those who think that there is nothing in Communist conquest but a Russian expansion which would have taken

place in substantially the same way under a Czarist government, certain questions must be put. It should be asked whether the Czars ever controlled a quarter of the votes of the electorate of France and a third of those of Italy; whether they were ever able to direct important trade unions in Britain; whether they ever had in their service for the sake of political conviction alone an Alger Hiss or an Alan Nunn May; whether they were ever able to gather thousands of boys and girls from all over the world to youth congresses and fill them with delirious enthusiasm for the policies of the Russian state at the expense of their own countries.

It is surely clear that the Czars enjoyed none of these advantages, and equally that such advantages cannot be dismissed as insignificant. Communism today is more than the Soviet Union, it is more even than the whole bloc of states which have Communist governments; it is not only Malenkov and Mao Tse-tung, but also Saillant and Togliatti. Communism is a worldwide political force which is not confined by any frontiers; the only division is between those countries where Communists have seized power and those where they have not yet done so, but would attempt it at any suitable opportunity.

When Bolshevism first forced itself on the attention of diplomats, there were sometimes references in state papers to "the international Communist party," and it is perhaps a pity that this phrase which emphasizes the unity of Communists all over the world has gone out of use. The all-important feature of Communism as a factor in international politics is indeed its transcendence of the nation-state. For those fully initiated in the faith, the authentic Marxist-Leninists, there is only a conflict between two world powers in which the territories of national states are no more than sectors of the fighting front.

IF ONE pays attention to what Communist leaders say to their followers—as distinct from what they occasionally say to journalists visiting Moscow—it is evident that the mental outlook involved is something which

goes far beyond any mere nationalism, however truculent and predatory. Consider for example a speech made by one of the highest personages of the Soviet Union (at the time) on the occasion of the thirty-fourth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in November 1951:

The camp of peace is far stronger than the camp of war. . . . A considerable divergence of interests may be observed in the camp of war. . . . The major divergences are still those between the United States and Britain, both in Europe and in Asia. Can one possibly doubt that the differences in the imperialist camp will continue to be aggravated? The weakness of the rear of imperialism constitutes an even more serious factor. There exist impressive forces of the partisans of peace . . . the growth of national liberation movements in colonial and dependent countries. The people of Vietnam are heroically struggling for their liberation. The peoples of the Philippines, Burma, and Malaya are in the fight. Nor have the people of Indonesia laid down their arms. The forces of resistance to imperialism are growing in the countries of the Near and Middle East and of North and South Africa. We see a different situation in the camp of democracy and peace. The forces of this camp are free from all internal contradictions whatsoever.

The speaker of these words, Lavrenti Beria, had indeed overlooked a small contradiction in the camp of "democracy and peace"—the one which within two years was to put him in a prison cell as an imperialist agent and enemy of the people. But even in this personal adversity he may have consoled himself with the thought that the unanimity and continuity of world Communist propaganda have been virtually unaffected by his own disappearance. The very fact that all the agencies of Communist publicity everywhere go on saying substantially what Beria said in 1951, even though he is in prison, shows that we are dealing with the essence of Communism, which is independent of this or that political leader and is not altered by rivalries for supreme power within the party-state. The fundamental ideological conception of Communism is that of a mortal worldwide struggle between two powers, which ultimately can only be resolved by

violence and can only, by the dialectic of history, result in the victory of Communism. Everything else is tactics, temporary expedience, feint, maneuver, or playing for time. The conflict cannot be confined within any frontiers because basically it is not conceived in national terms at all.

IT HAS always been assumed in Western thinking about the Soviet Union that international revolutionary Communism and Russian nationalism are incompatible alternatives, so that when Soviet publicity glorifies the Russian past and sanctifies in retrospect the expansion of the Czarist empire, it follows that world revolution must have been definitively renounced. Such an assumption has indeed the authority of both Marx and Lenin, but it is nearly thirty years out of date, for the special achievement of Stalin ever since his first rise to power has been his success in combining these two superficially opposed political forces.

Today it is official doctrine that the unique national genius of Russia, already for many centuries culturally superior to Western Europe and, of course, the real originator of all those scientific and technological discoveries which the West has falsely claimed, brought forth the new world of Communism as the climax of its creative activity; the essentially universal and world-embracing character of the Communist faith in its struggle against imperialism, far from cancelling or obscuring the preeminent function of the Russian people, entitles it to world leadership and gives it a historical mission which cannot be subject to any geographical limits. It has been all the easier to inculcate among Russians the idea of a special world-saving destiny because the way was so well prepared by the prophets of Pan-Slavism, such as Dostoevsky, who saw Christian Orthodox Russia as the savior, even by force, of a decadent civilization.

It was not Lenin or Stalin, but Dostoevsky, who, in anticipation of a Russian war against Western Europe, wrote that "so much that is new and progressive will begin in human relations that it would be useless to mourn

and to hesitate on the eve of the last great struggle which will bring about the great regeneration of all Europe." The "Populist" revolutionaries of 19th-century Russia rejected the medieval Christian inspiration of the Slavophiles, but took over from them the idea of a Russian world-mission, no longer to revive and extend Slav Orthodox Christianity but to initiate a new age of socialism for all mankind.

The Bolsheviks claimed—and still claim—to derive their doctrine solely from Marx, but they were also in fact deeply influenced by the tradition of the non-Marxist Russian revolutionaries, particularly Chernishevsky and Nechayev; indeed, it is impossible to understand Bolshevism from Marxist origins alone. After the Bolshevik Revolution had triumphed in Russia, but had failed to detonate the expected worldwide upheaval, the new regime became more and more closely identified with Russian nationality and it was found politically profitable to appeal to traditional nationalist fears, prejudices, and aspirations. This tendency reached its climax during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45, when Russians were daily exhorted to remember the struggles of their ancestors against Charles XII and Napoleon.

THE mistake of Western observers was to suppose that all this implied acceptance of the limitations of a normal nation-state, abandonment of world-revolutionary aims, and a willingness to allow liberated and enemy countries to choose their own governments through free elections. It was therefore a great surprise to the Western Allies when Soviet military power was everywhere used to install Communist parties in power. Stalin, it seemed, was behaving like a Trotskyite instead of the man who had proclaimed "socialism in one country."

But the Stalinists had never in fact renounced the idea of violent international revolution; they had only postponed it until conditions should be more favorable, and the defeats of Germany and Japan in the Second World War provided just the conditions required. The extension of Commu-

nism over Eastern Europe and the mainland of East Asia could then only have been prevented if the United States and Britain had been firmly resolved to oppose the advance; but as their governments completely miscalculated Stalin's intentions, they failed to take advantage of Russia's exhaustion at the end of the war to impede a process which since 1941 has trebled the number of human beings under Communist rule.

Bitter experience has now induced the principal nations of the non-Communist world to combine in their own defense, but the wishful thinkers are still looking for a way out from the unpleasant and unforeseen reality. Perhaps the Soviet Union, after all, was just frightened and was only trying to build up a security zone round its frontiers. Perhaps the trouble was really all due to Stalin and Zhdanov, and now that we have only Malenkov and Molotov to deal with, everything will be quite different. Then there are the European satellites and Communist China; surely their national interests are bound to come into conflict with those of Russia, and the leaders of the Soviet bloc will inevitably quarrel among themselves if only they are left to their own devices. There is Tito; so far, it is true, there has only been one, but nobody can prove that there will not be another. We must therefore avoid any kind of ideological anti-Communism in the free world, because this might discourage potential Titos from breaking away.

There are certainly strains and stresses within the Communist camp, but the cracks in the edifice are far less significant than the massive unity which it continues to maintain. Except for Yugoslavia, the Communist parties of the world, whether they hold governmental power or not, still speak with a single voice on all major issues. Today it is not any conflict between Moscow and Prague, but the growing strength of the pro-Soviet faction in France that is the most striking feature of the international scene in Europe; in the Far East hopes of a rift between Moscow and Peking remain merely hopes, but the divergence of policies between America and Britain is a fact.

Can it really be a remedy for such a state of affairs for the free world, in the face of a coalition more integrated than itself, to loosen still further the bonds of common faith and common purpose in order to revert to policies of opportunist national egoism? Should it not be clear that the democracies can only save themselves by going forward to attain a higher degree of international unity than they have yet reached, in order to counterbalance the closely combined political power of their adversaries?

THE great strength of Communism in the contemporary world lies in the fact that it goes beyond the nation-state and is to that extent in accord with the most profound trend of the age. In one way or another, under the technological conditions of our time mankind must attain a higher degree of political unity than can be provided by an aggregation of fully sovereign nation-states.

This can be achieved either by the supremacy of a single power imposing a despotic order on mankind through conquest and terror, or by the increasing voluntary cooperation of free peoples. These are the alternatives; the way back to the nation-state sovereignty politics of the 18th and 19th centuries is not a genuine alternative, but only a path of delusion which will make its victims easy prey for conquest by a power which understands how to utilize the world-unifying factors of the age.

Communism is well equipped politically for world conquest just because its horizons are not those of the nation-state. The fully indoctrinated and conditioned Communist thinks globally, not nationally. He can use nationalism to rally the masses just as the dope-trafficker can profit from the sale of heroin without being himself an addict. Of course, the dope-seller may become an addict and the Communist may succumb to

genuinely nationalist emotions, but the odds are that, if he knows his business, he will not.

THE preservation of Western democratic values depends on a clear recognition of the fact that Communism as a political factor in the world is a super-national entity, something more than a group of states linked together by alliances of the old-fashioned type. It can be opposed successfully only by a comparable solidarity of the democracies based on a positive affirmation of their own values.

This cannot be brought about by a merely negative anti-Communism. In Europe anti-Communism is coming to be more and more identified with "McCarthyism," which with its go-it-alone neo-isolationism is just as disruptive of NATO as the European neutralism it denounces. The important thing is to strengthen NATO, which means on the European side a greater awareness that escape from ideological conflict is impossible in the circumstances of our time, and on the American side a clearer recognition that an alliance of free democracies can only be held together by continuous mutual consultation and understanding.

In practical terms, NATO must be given a more popular basis than it has had so far; it is working well at governmental and official levels, but as yet it lacks those roots in the feelings and loyalties of peoples which a union of democratic nations ought to have. It has been suggested that an inter-parliamentary assembly of NATO countries might meet once a year to receive and discuss a report from the executive. In any case, NATO is the only sure foundation on which we can build; its construction has been the one great positive achievement of the Western nations since the overthrow of Hitler. The future depends on what we make of the work we have begun.